

Narrator:

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As the United States remembers those who have fought in its wars on Veterans Day, November 11th, one group of citizens - Native Americans, the very first Americans, can lay claim to a special part of history. November is also American Indian Heritage Month, and American Indians are being recognized for their long history of participating with distinction in United States military actions.

As scouts and auxiliary troops, Native Americans assisted U.S. troops in the War of 1812 and the Civil War and on the American frontier. More than 12,000 served in the U.S. military in World War I and 44,000 served in World War II, according to the Naval Historical Center.

The Navajo Code Talkers of World War II are perhaps the best-recognized American Indian military figures. About 400 Navajo Indians served with the U.S. Marines, mostly in the Pacific theater, transmitting secret tactical messages over military telephone or radio communications networks using codes built on their native languages. The National Museum of the American Indian points out that the Code Talkers had to memorize 17 pages of code as part of their training. It was the only battlefield code never broken by the enemy. Were it not for the Navajos, the Marines would never have taken Iwo Jima, according to one high-ranking signal officer.

The U.S. Army also used some Cherokee, Choctaw, Comanche, Hopi and Meskwaki soldiers during World War II.

The Associated Press reported that 13 of the Navajo Code Talkers participated in New York City's 2009 Veterans Day parade, the largest in the country. Only about 50 of the 400 Code Talkers are still alive, and most live in the Navajo Nation reservation that spans Arizona, New Mexico and Utah.

Some of the Code Talkers' stories are being preserved through the Veterans History Project of the U.S. Library of Congress. The project collects stories, letters, videos and other mementos from all veterans about their experiences in World War II and every war since.

The site has collected about 66,000 stories so far. Its page on Experiencing War lists more than two dozen categories of stories that can be accessed online, such as prisoners of war, D-Day, military medicine and military intelligence. In November, the Veterans History Project is spotlighting the Native Americans who fought for their country. American Indians served a government that did not always keep its word to their ancestors, according to project materials.

In 2001, President George W. Bush presented congressional gold medals to four of the original 29 Code Talkers. Another 300 or so Navajo who had trained as Code Talkers received silver medals.

Wildlife conservation professionals from more than 30 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean recently met in Montelimar, Nicaragua, to create a system for training the next generation of conservationists in the region.

The meeting was conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the nongovernmental organization Fauna & Flora International. More than 50

top conservation practitioners gathered to help design an educational program for regional conservationists.

Researchers estimate that 40 percent of the world's biological diversity can be found in Latin America and the Caribbean, making it one of the most environmentally significant regions on the planet. About 60 percent of the Amazon rainforest, the largest tropical forest on the planet, lies within the borders of Brazil, and one of the world's highest annual losses of forest is in northwest Ecuador. Forest loss means habitat loss and increasing pressure on many species of birds, amphibians, reptiles and mammals that are already seriously endangered.

The number of natural resource professionals in this resource-rich area is very small, in part due to the absence of conservation training opportunities. By way of comparison, the United States contains approximately 10 percent of the world's biological diversity but has twice as many university-level conservation education programs as are found in Latin America. The meeting in Nicaragua aims to address that imbalance.

The core mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is conserving fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. It has also played a significant and expanding role in conservation efforts worldwide as a partner in bilateral and multinational efforts. The service's Wildlife Without Borders Program for Latin America and the Caribbean, which sponsored the meeting in Nicaragua, strives to improve human and institutional capacity to protect the region's fragile ecosystems. For more than 20 years, the program has supported training throughout the region, focusing on protected-area managers, park guards, community leaders and graduate students.

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